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Symphonic Pastorals

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To the memory of Reinhold Brinkmann (1934-2010).

The Symphony as 'Absolute Music'?

A popular misunderstanding of the symphony is that the genre is devoid of the meanings conveyed in texted music such as songs and choruses. The idea of the symphony as 'absolute music' – 'abstract' or 'pure' sound, music for its own sake, in contrast to the narrativity of 'programme music' – stems particularly from the influence of twentieth-century critics such as Donald Tovey, Leonard Bernstein and Carl Dahlhaus.² Regarding Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (*Pastoral*), Tovey claimed that the work would have been the same without a programme and that it was a straightforward classical (that is, absolute) symphony like Beethoven's others; Bernstein advised audiences to ignore Beethoven's narrative and focus instead on pure musical processes, such as motivic development (see Will 2002a: 19-20). Dahlhaus argued that the symphony as a genre was 'a prototype for the development of the theory of absolute music around 1800' and that absolute music was the core of nineteenth-century aesthetics (1991: 10). In other words, the symphony might be a sort of text that exists only in relation to itself, as if it were a New Critical abstraction. While the appeal and diffusion of this symphony-as-absolute-music concept have been widespread, recent scholarship has revised that history (Pederson 2009 argued that Dahlhaus exaggerated the idea of absolute music).

It is understandable that both highly trained critics and non-specialized audiences might construe the symphony in abstract or 'absolute' terms. After all, the symphony does not have sung text (works such as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony being exceptions). Nevertheless, aestheticians since the eighteenth century have defined the genre in relation to vocal music and poetic forms such as the Pindaric ode (see Sulzer 1771-74, Koch 1802, Jones 1973, and Bonds 1997). And contemporary critics have analyzed non-vocal symphonies and provided historical, political, literary and narratological interpretations (for example, Bonds 2006 and Kraus 1991), as well as ecocritical readings.

My intention in this essay is to outline a brief critical history of selected symphonies in relation to the pastoral to show that even in a genre that has been conceived as abstract,

symphonies can relate ideas about nature. Moreover, despite Dahlhaus's argument about the unity of the entire nineteenth-century symphony regarding absolute music, these symphonic ideas about nature were changing over time. The symphony is a text that is fertile ground for ecocritical musicological interpretation.

As ecocriticism studies cultural texts that imagine and portray human-environment relationships, so ecomusicology 'considers musical and sonic issues, both textual and performative, related to ecology and the natural environment' (Allen, forthcoming). The theoretical backgrounds for this study of symphonic pastorals come from ecocritical scholarship on the pastoral as well as musicological work on the symphony and the sublime. A brief review of each provides some necessary context.

Buell (1995) characterized the pastoral as a genre that 'may direct us toward the realm of physical nature, or it may abstract us from it' (31). The symphonic pastoral is an example of this contradictory situation in that the symphonic experience is a decidedly public, socially-centred one (at least prior to the possibility of portable reproducible musical experiences; even then, the simultaneous experience of nature with recorded symphonic music would be technologically mediated). Buell further observes the multiple 'ideological position[s]' possible with the (American) pastoral (1995: 44) as well as the idea of 'pastoral nationalism', which reflects both post-colonial and 'old world' tendencies that 'imagine nation in terms of country or hinterland' (2005: 144). Such nationalist endeavours are evident particularly in late nineteenth-century music, including pastoral symphonies. Gifford (1999) structures understanding of the literary pastoral in three areas: the Arcadian type involving retreat to and return from the idyll, the generalized rural with implicit or explicit comparison to the urban, and the pejorative idealisation. The idyll is particularly evident with symphonic pastorals, although the generalized rural is also present. Developed in regard to Anglo-American literature, Marx's two types of pastoral, the 'popular and sentimental' and the 'imaginative and complex' (1964: 5), provide a particularly useful framework for understanding symphonic pastorals.

As with the pastoral, the aesthetics of the sublime originated in the Ancient Classical era, but the rhetoric of the sublime matured around the same time as the genre of the symphony, in the late eighteenth century (also known in music historiography as the Classical era). As Naested (2003) explains, Edmund Burke (1757) and Immanuel Kant (1790) discussed the sublime in the context of nature; early nineteenth century accounts by C. F. Michaelis (1805) and Friedrich Rochlitz (1830) developed the musical sublime, which

applied particularly to symphonies. Philosophical descriptions and musical understandings varied, but circa 1800 the sublime in music could be characterised by some deviation from musical norms combined with an element of cognitive frustration (Naested 2003). Many symphonic pastorals deviated from the symphonic norm, although they simultaneously had their own pastoral-symphonic expectations. Similarly, cognitive frustration is evident in some musical elements of these works, elements that can thwart non-pastoral music expectations yet, paradoxically, come to illustrate the expected musical tropes of the pastoral.

From ‘Simple’ Pastoral Idylls to a ‘Complex’ Grotesquerie: Knecht’s *Portrait*, Beethoven’s *Pastoral* and Berlioz’s *Fantastic*

Will (2002a) has catalogued some seventy pastoral symphonies from the period ca. 1750-1815. These works, together with other topoi that evoke military, religious or national topics, constitute the ‘characteristic symphony’: an instrumental piece for which text is employed to associate music with a subject. This subgenre of some 225 works pales in comparison to the abstract ideal of the symphony, represented by thousands of works in that period. As one of the most common types of characteristic symphony, pastoral works took an emotional stance to ‘express pleasure in idyllic settings or shudder before storms’ (Will 2002a: 2); that is, they tried to elicit pastoral and sublime emotions. Some pastorals were part of larger works, such as the ‘Pifa’ from G.F. Handel’s *Messiah* (1742), while others such as Johann Stamitz’s *Sinfonia Pastorale* (1754-57) provided merely a title and some stock musical figures (such as a quotation of a Christmas carol, simple harmonies, or a common musical pastoral element: drones), which could be misconstrued as a work in a different topos, such as religious or national music. Numerous works of other genres earlier in the eighteenth century also represented nature, such as the concertos of Antonio Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* (1723-25) (see Bockmaier 1992). Two works from the period ca. 1750-1815 stand out for their lasting recognition, as well as for their conceptual connections regarding the pastoral: Justin Heinrich Knecht’s *Le Portrait Musical de la Nature* (1785) and Ludwig van Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony, Opus 68 (1808), which he titled *Sinfonia Pastorella* (referred to simply as the *Pastoral*).³ The Knecht and Beethoven symphonies are idyllic pastorals, though of different sorts.

Knecht’s *Portrait* is in three parts with five movements, numbers two through five of which are played *attacca* (without pause). Knecht provided brief descriptions for each movement: the first presents the idyllic setting, the middle three constitute a storm, and the

finale is the ensuing thanksgiving. (See Table 1.⁴) Will understands the whole work to be in two-parts, due mostly to the continuous music of the latter movements (2002a: 175), but the piece is three contrasting experiences: a peaceful idyll, a stormy interruption, and a thankful return to the idyll.

The main theme of the first movement is built from a horn motive, perhaps derived from what was a common compositional choice at the time: a *ranz des vaches* of the Swiss Alps (Höhn 1984: xvii), a song that, according to Rousseau (1768), was emotionally evocative of home.⁵ The invocation of the mountains with the alphorn is then followed by another common pastoral trope: birdcalls, which comprise the second idyll theme. The middle three movements entail the approach of a storm, the thunderstorm itself, and the calm after the storm. The excitement of this section, which reflects the idea of the sublime, caused one nineteenth-century commentator to observe: ‘One is struck by the unexpected nuances in the dynamics, by the contrasts between forte and piano, crescendo and decrescendo, and by the sudden appearance of a pianissimo after a mighty crescendo’ (in Höhn 1984: xviii). Knecht titled the final movement ‘L’Inno con variazioni’ (a ‘Hymn with variations’) and describes Nature giving thanks to the creator. This movement is interrupted with sections that Knecht labelled ‘Coro’ (‘Chorus’); together with the ‘Inno’ of the title, these terms serve to convey human emotion (Höhn 1984: xviii), and they betray the vocal origins of the symphonic genre.

Jung (1995) interprets Knecht’s *Portrait* as a theatrical piece. That perspective is based on the descriptions of natural actions and human feelings as well as Knecht’s intellectual influences from the characteristic symphony and contemporaneous literature and ideas, particularly those of the poet and theatre director Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), who mentored Knecht and introduced the young composer to the works of Franz Joseph Haydn and Shakespeare (Wieland’s troupe staged his own translation of *The Tempest*). Höhn (1984: xx) also observes ‘the scenic-dramatic element of the theater’ in the piece. In a semi-dramatic move, Knecht recalls the music of the first movement at the end of the final movement, bolstering the idea that after an interruption the pastoral idyll has returned.

Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony both follows and breaks from its potential model: Knecht’s *Portrait*.⁶ The Sixth is in five movements – like Knecht’s, exceeding the symphonic norm of four. Beethoven’s latter three movements are also played *attacca*, and in the middle (the

fourth movement) is a storm (sometimes glossed as an extended introduction to the finale). Beethoven's descriptive titles for each movement are pithier than Knecht's (see Table 1); his other textual provisions include naming birds toward the end of the 'Scene by the Brook', the explanatory phrase 'More an expression of feeling than tone painting' appended to the title page of the published score, and numerous comments in his sketchbooks.

Beethoven revered nature and enjoyed his frequent trips out of Vienna and into the countryside (see Jones 1995: 19-20; Jones also provides all original German and English translations of the Beethoven texts of and comments on the Sixth). The general narrative and musical aspects of the Sixth reflect a 'Memory of Country Life' (as per Beethoven's sketch notes) and the 'joyous' and 'merry' feelings of the suspended passing of time in what was, for Beethoven, sacred territory. The interruption of the storm, which provides the dramatic and fearful sublime tension in the visit, leads to the 'thankful feelings' of the final movement. Critics have provided divergent views on both the minutia and generalities of the Sixth for over two centuries (see Will 2002b and Jones 1995: 81ff); my intention here is simply to show the work's pastoral character and personal religiosity.

Beethoven's Sixth has at least seven musical features that reflect the idyllic pastoral. The speed of the whole is mostly moderate; the fast tempos are not too fast, slow tempos not too slow. Second, consonance and major keys are prevalent, almost to the exclusion of dissonance and minor keys. Third, harmonic motion is both prolonged – in the sense that Beethoven lingers on sonorities before changing them – and constrained, in the sense that the usual contrast of tonic relaxation with dominant tension (here, F major and C major) is rare, even though it is a hallmark of tonal music; instead, harmonic movement is mostly the more gentle contrast of tonic with subdominant (F major and B-flat major). The important exception regarding these three initial features is the storm, in which the necessary contrast is provided with faster tempos and rhythmic figures, minor and dissonant harmonies, and the first use in the symphony of piccolo, trombone, and timpani. Furthermore, the main harmonic area in the storm is that of the dominant, which prepares for the 'thankful' arrival of the final movement (and the tonic). Overall, however, the moderations of tempo, key and harmonic motion reflect equanimity in nature and a languid sense of time.

The fourth feature is this sense of time. Will argues that time is differentiated in the Sixth between the timelessness of the idyll and the historicity of the real world and its threats (that is, the storm). The contrasts between the two halves of the symphony – the first two movements, which are played separately and constitute a 'symphonic half', distinct from the

latter three movements, which are played *attacca* and constitute a ‘characteristic half’ – give the sensation that ‘[t]ime seems to run differently’ (2002a: 171, see also Will 1997). The contrast of the storm provides a kick-start to time, a reminder that interrupts the placid arrival and the daydreaming and festivities of the previous three movements (see Table 1). This interruption results in the final ‘happy and thankful feelings’, a sort of arrival on a higher appreciative plane of humility and respect for creation. The continuous flow of the final three movements both dramatizes the interruption and emphasizes the thankfulness. The concluding movement is a ‘Shepherd’s Song’ intoned by the horn; it may be a secular hymn but, along with organ-like sonorities (Will 2002b: 212), it appears nevertheless as a grateful song of praise – be it to the deity, the blue sky of the idyll, or the return to the less structured time of pastoral grace.

The fifth feature is in regard to the second movement, ‘Scene by the Brook’, which is a popular locus for programmatic interpretation; reactions range from the picturesque images it evokes to the possibility that it reflected the moment when a goldfinch foretold Beethoven’s deafness (see Jander 1993, but also the disagreement in Will 2002b and Lockwood 2003: 519). The imagery derives mostly from the continual motion in the low strings, which evoke flowing water, and the high string trills of birds; at the end of the movement, Beethoven identifies the birds: nightingale (flute), quail (oboe), and cuckoo (two clarinets). This expansion of the space between the low strings (low lying water) and of the high strings (birds high in the trees) is reflected on the page of Beethoven’s 1808 orchestral score, which followed the standard eighteenth-century convention (different from modern scores) of having the upper strings at the top of the page, followed by the winds and brass in the middle, with the low strings at the bottom (Lockwood 2003: 519). In all, this musical depiction of natural space comes closest to painting a picture of the pastoral visitor dreaming near the waterside aviary (such imagery is explored in Schmenner 1998).

The sixth aspect relates to a common feature of symphonies: the use of a stylized dance movement for the third movement. Most such minuets or scherzos have two main parts, the dance itself and a lighter trio, after which the dance repeats. Beethoven’s ‘Merry Gathering of Country People’ continues the major-mode emphasis of the entire symphony, while the trio increases the joviality with an even faster, *fortissimo* dance (where a traditional minuet’s trio might scale back in volume and texture, this one increases both; further, portions of the minuet are truncated rather than repeated and lead more quickly into the trio). The accented drones reflect a common pastoral trope and continue the trend of slow harmonic

change. The emphatic presence of festive humans in the idyll reflects a realistic view of the natural world: that is, one that is neither wild nor somehow pure, but rather one that reflects humanity's place in nature.

The final musical feature of Beethoven's symphony that relates to the pastoral is the religious aspect. Aside from general associations of the pastoral with sacred music, the religiosity of the Sixth comes out in both musical and biographical contexts. Numerous procedures and sonorities evoke relationships with Haydn's oratorios *The Creation* (1796-98) and *The Seasons* (1799-1801). The latter is an unusual example of a non-religious oratorio; librettist Baron Gottfried van Swieten based his texts about weather on the pastoral poem (1726-28) by James Thomson. In fact, Beethoven's shepherd's horn has a melodic precedent in *The Seasons* (Jones 1995: 10-14), and it shares a resemblance with Knecht's opening theme. The repetitions of Beethoven's alphorn melody, a generic sort of *ranz des vaches*, resemble the form of a church hymn (Will 2002a: 182). In his draft sketches for the storm, Beethoven wrote 'Lord, we thank thee', and accordingly the title of the ensuing movement is often translated as 'Shepherd's *Hymn*' rather than 'Song'. One of Beethoven's favourite books was a well-marked copy of Christoph Christian Sturm's *Reflections on the Works of God in the Realm of Nature and Providence*, which found religious ideas in all aspects of nature (see Jones 1995: 21-22). Furthermore, Will understands the arc of the symphony as transforming its 'natural paradise into a moral one' (2002a: 184, see also Will 1997). The parallel with the concluding 'Hymn' of Knecht's *Portrait* is clear, yet rather than a public theatrical expression, Beethoven's is more a personal paean to nature.

Both Knecht's *Portrait* and Beethoven's Sixth are what Marx (1964) called simple, or 'popular and sentimental', pastorals (5). These works reflect 'the felicity represented by an image of a natural landscape, a terrain either unspoiled or, if cultivated, rural' (9). Marx's characterization of the movement 'away from the city and toward the country' is apropos both for Beethoven's life and his Sixth Symphony. Knecht and Beethoven, however, do engage with the pastoral in different manners: the former in a public and quasi-dramatic tableau, the latter in a more personal religious experience. Other critics have interpreted the Sixth in both the heroic realm typical of Beethoven reception (that is, a generally non-programmatic plot archetype of overcoming adversity, as in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; see, for example, Jander 1993) and in an atypical vein that sees the work apart from that heroic tradition (Jones 1995; see also Will 2002b and 2002a: 184-187, which stresses a more general humanity rather than a heroic type). Tovey and Bernstein's absolutist formulations

(cited above) tried to portray the Sixth as abstract music, and Beethoven himself seems to have had some hesitance about combining programme music with the symphony. In his sketchbooks for the symphony, Beethoven wrote ‘One leaves it to the listener to discover the situations’, and ‘Each act of tone-painting, as soon as it is pushed too far in instrumental music, loses its force’; and then there is the sketchbook antecedent for the suggestive comment on the eventual title-page: ‘The whole will be understood even without a description, as it is more feeling than tone-painting’ (in Lockwood 2003: 225). The word *feeling*, here as elsewhere in Beethoven’s comments, together with his hesitance in explaining too much about the symphony, resonates with Marx’s observation that the simple pastoral is ‘an expression less of thought than of feeling’ (1964: 5). Nevertheless, Beethoven did provide titles in a narrative format and did imitate sounds of birds, a dance, and a storm – all public features of the pastoral accessible to contemporaneous listeners (see Will 2002a and 2002b: 210). Moreover, listeners since have continued to find in the Sixth an idyllic pastoral inflected with personal religiosity.

Beethoven may have hesitated in his engagement with programmatic music, but Hector Berlioz was unapologetic in his fundamentally literary approach to a programme symphony, the piece that launched his career: *Épisode de la vie d’un Artiste*, more commonly known by its subtitle *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830).⁷ Berlioz did more than provide pithy titles or brief descriptions in this archetypal Romantic symphony: he provided a rough short story to be distributed to the audience. Berlioz’s programme tells of an artist who falls in love but is rejected and overdoses on opium; he then dreams that he kills his beloved, is executed at the gallows, and sees her at an orgy of witches. (Table 1 contains only the movement titles, as the programme is widely available and too long to reprint in full.) Initial appearances aside, Berlioz’s symphony is connected with the pastoral tradition through both a movement ‘In the Fields’ and the use of Beethoven’s Sixth as a model. But in Berlioz’s *Fantastic*, the simple pastoral takes a pessimistic and grotesque turn towards Marx’s ‘imaginative and complex’ pastoral.

As with Beethoven’s Sixth, critics such as Jacques Barzun (1950) have tried to explain away the verbal portion and argue that the *Fantastic* is absolute music, yet commentators rarely pass up the opportunity to cite the programme in discussing the work. Nicholas Temperley (1971)⁸ has argued that Berlioz’s music cannot be separated from the deliberately unpolished literary component that provides the essential emotional, if not

narrative, corollary that allowed the composer to manipulate his audience's feelings. Berlioz knew that his method needed some explaining, as he makes clear in his introductory note, published with the score in 1846 (still, despite years of revisions, substantially the same as its premiere in 1830):⁹

The composer's intention has been to develop, insofar as they contain musical possibilities, various situations in the life of an artist. The outline of the instrumental drama, which lacks the help of words, needs to be explained in advance. The following program should thus be considered as the spoken text of an opera, serving to introduce the musical movements, whose character and expression it motivates. (In Cone 1971: 21.)

Berlioz's work has been associated with the operatic tradition (Langford 1983), and the composer's introductory note makes this parallel to aid his audience in understanding. As connective musical material to complement the programme, Berlioz employed an *idée fixe*: a melody that returns in various guises in each movement.

After the emotional turmoil, or 'le vague des passions', of the first movement when the musician 'sees for the first time a woman [...] and he falls desperately in love with her', the second movement is a dance 'in the midst of *the tumult of a party*' where 'the beloved vision appears before him and disturbs his peace of mind'. The third movement finds him in the countryside, and 'He reflects upon his isolation; he hopes that his loneliness will soon be over [...] But what if she were deceiving him!' Realizing that his love is not returned, in the fourth movement he 'poisons himself with opium', but he does not manage to kill himself; rather, he only dreams 'that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned and led to the scaffold, and that he is witnessing *his own execution*'.

The conclusion of the March recalls the initial phrase (or so-called 'head') of the *idée fixe*, which the orchestra cuts off; there follows plucked strings and a triumphal conclusion in what can be interpreted as the artist's severed head falling into the guillotine basket to the roaring cheers of the crowd. The dream continues in the final movement, when he observes a gaggle of witches who have come to observe his funeral. The *idée fixe* returns in the introduction of the finale, 'but it has lost its character of nobility and shyness; it is no more than a dance tune, mean, trivial, and grotesque: it is she, coming to join the sabbath... A roar of joy at her arrival... She takes part in the devilish orgy... Funeral knell, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae*, *sabbath round-dance*'. (The story continues in the sequel, *Lélio, or the Return*

to *Life*, and the work's complicated textual histories are made more complex by Berlioz's later changes to the published programme of the *Fantastic*, which, perhaps surprisingly, required no concomitant change to the music; see Temperley, 1971: 598ff, *et passim*.)

On the surface, Berlioz's programme does not resemble Beethoven's Sixth, although some commentators hear echoes of the earlier composer in the movement 'In the Fields' (Temperley 1971: 606). But on a deeper level, and when considering one of Berlioz's drafts, their structures are remarkably similar to each other (and, to a lesser degree, to Knecht's *Portrait*). Table 1 separates the movements with varying types of borders, which indicate here different types of sectional divisions. The five-movement works are in three sections: an introduction that focuses on the feelings and emotions of an interior, personal world; three middle movements that present events in an exterior, social world; and a concluding movement that returns to the interior self.¹⁰ The introduction for Beethoven is joy upon arriving in the country, while for Berlioz it is the excitement of love. The exterior world in each work is represented by a pastoral idyll, a dance, and a threatening power; this last is for Beethoven a natural character (storm), while for Berlioz it is a social power (execution). In the spring of 1830, some ten months before the premiere on 5 December, Berlioz described his draft of the *Fantastic* with the second ('A Ball') and third ('In the Fields') movements switched (Cone 1971: 7-9, where the third movement is translated as 'Scene in the Country'). Berlioz's earlier version, represented in Table 1, parallels Beethoven's Sixth: the pastoral movements ('In the Fields' and 'Scene by the Brook', respectively) and the dance movements ('A Ball' and 'Merry Gathering of Country People') were thus in the same places. Ultimately, Berlioz switched them to their final position, perhaps to shy away from his model. The final movements both return to the interior world of emotion, but where Beethoven provides a positive, optimistic outlook by thanking the creator for the return to the idyll after the storm, Berlioz instead provides a negative view, 'grotesque' as he wrote, in which his tormented love threatens him in an opium-induced nightmare.

This turn to the grotesque is also evident in the structure of Berlioz's pastoral movement, 'In the Fields', which itself mirrors the tripartite structure of the idyllic pastorals that came before. Both Knecht and Beethoven's symphonies provide a three-part journey: idyll established, idyll interrupted, idyll re-established. Berlioz's, however, departs from that model by ending with romantic torment. His pastoral movement is in three sections. First is an introduction in which the English horn and oboe – the former is a larger and lower-pitched version of the latter – pass a theme back and forth; Berlioz calls this theme a *ranz des vaches*

(although it probably is not such a traditional tune) and describes it as two shepherds piping to each other across a distance. The long middle section is a series of variations on a different theme; it is interrupted by an agitated section when the *idée fixe* appears, which reflects an interior, personal storm (rather than an exterior, natural storm). The concluding section returns to the English horn melody from the opening – but the oboe is absent, and the only response is from four timpani who rumble like thunder. The shepherdess (oboe) has abandoned her loving shepherd (English horn).

At the opening of Berlioz's pastoral movement, the echo – a 'recurrent device in pastoral' (Marx 1964: 23) – functions as a 'metaphor of reciprocity'; the shepherd calls out to the woods, from which he hears the same 'notes of his pipe' respond and 'echo back' (23). But the reciprocal love of the outset is altered; both Berlioz's 'In the Fields' and the *Fantastic* as a whole are complex pastorals.

Marx uses Nathaniel Hawthorne's observations of Sleepy Hollow to establish the 'metaphoric design' or 'paradigm' for the complex pastoral: 'What begins as a conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world – a simple pleasure fantasy – is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind' (15). The machine for Hawthorne was the train, represented only by its sound. For Berlioz – the 'poet in disguise', as 'Tityrus represents Virgil himself' in the *Eclogues* (22) – it is not a machine that interrupts his pastoral; rather, the 'counterforce' (Marx's term for the disruptive or threatening power) is the artist's own internal nature of doubt: an interior storm that builds as the artist fears his love is deceiving him, represented by the sound of an agitated *idée fixe*. Thus, Berlioz's pastoral scene questions, as Marx put it, 'the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture' (24). While the calm returns in the latter portion of the second section of 'In the Fields', thus seeming to reconcile that interior turmoil, the third and concluding part of the movement – which in good Romantic, fashion cycles back to the opening idea – thwarts such a reading: the shepherd's pipe returns, but the only response is thunder. In neither this thunderous lack of response nor the stormy emotional reflection is the storm merely a sublime interlude that allows for a return to an earlier idyll; rather, the course of the narrative is fundamentally altered.

In part, it is the use of nature, both internal and external, to disrupt the pastoral that makes Berlioz's pastoral grotesque; in part, it is the artist's own transformation of his beloved (as represented by the *idée fixe*) from an image of desperate love to an agitating presence to a witch at an orgy. But further, Berlioz twists typical pastoral gender roles. As Marx

understands the pastoral, the counterforce that intrudes ‘upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction [...] invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness in contrast with the tender, feminine, and submissive attitudes traditionally attached to the landscape’ (29). For Berlioz, however, the artist’s landscape is masculine, and the counterforce is the female love interest – over whom the composer eventually reasserts his dominance by writing her into a grotesque orgy that he watches while on an opium high, or as Marx puts it, in a ‘complex state of mind’ (15).

From Romantic to Rupture: Brahms’s First and Second Symphonies, and Mahler’s Third Symphony

In contrast to Berlioz’s *Fantastic*, Johannes Brahms treats the subject of love more kindly in his First Symphony (1862-77).¹¹ Brahms had a long and productive friendship with Clara Schumann, the wife of one of his greatest supporters, Robert Schumann. While speculation and gossip have long surrounded Clara and Johannes’ relationship, most scholars agree that their love was never consummated but remained platonic: that of friends with deep and lasting artistic, professional and personal connections (see Berry 2007; Reich 2001: 169ff; and Avins 1996: 757ff). Their feelings were exchanged and preserved in an extensive epistolary, since for much of their lives they lived in distant locales. In a sense, their relationship could be paralleled with the mature, respectful, and longing love of the Troubadours and Trouvères. Such distant but deep emotions are expressed in Brahms’s First Symphony in the context of the pastoral.

The usual interpretations of Brahms’s First are of struggle, of overcoming the shadow of Beethoven, and/or of the debate (prompted by Richard Wagner’s music and writings) over the role of voices in the symphony (see, for example, Bonds 1996, which incorporates Harold Bloom’s theory of misprision). Brahms did indeed struggle mightily with his first symphonic work, for he took over two decades to complete it. And Brahms himself acknowledged (more than once) the anxiety over Beethoven; the principal theme of the fourth movement is modelled on the ‘Ode to Joy’ theme of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, and as Brahms reportedly quipped, ‘every jackass notices it at once’ (in Bonds 1996: 1). Such wilful paraphrase associates the music with Beethoven’s text: Schiller’s *Ode an die Freunde*, which lauds universal brotherhood and the joy of love.

Reinhold Brinkmann has argued that through Brahms’s misreading of Beethoven’s Ninth in Brahms’s First, the subtext of that *Ode* – ‘the humanist fervor of freedom and

brotherliness' – is rejected in favour of religion and nature (1995: 32-53, 47, 45). Brahms takes the historical moment of Beethoven (the desire for peace in late eighteenth-century Vienna) and replaces it with his perception of those trans-historical needs. Brahms achieves this end by giving the impression that his 'Beethoven theme' will return at the end of the movement (also the end of the symphony), yet he avoids a full recapitulation and provides only a fragmented version of part of the tune. Furthermore, he provides two interruptions introduced initially in the slow introduction to the fourth movement: a brass chorale ('religion') and an alphorn melody ('nature'). No explicit text is invoked here; as Brinkmann, paraphrasing Arnold Schoenberg, put it: 'form is "used" to state a meaning in notes' (37). In essence, the struggle of Brahms's First is resolved, not with brotherhood or societal actions, but through religion and nature.

In the context of the pastoral, Brahms evokes Clara. On 12 September 1868, Brahms sent a postcard to Clara, saying 'Thus blew the shepherd's horn today', and he notated what would later be the alphorn melody with the underlying text, 'High up in the mountain, deep down in the wold, I greet you, I greet you a thousandfold' (in Litzmann 1973: 231). As the violins foreshadow the 'Beethoven theme' in the opening measures of the fourth movement, so too do the woodwinds foreshadow the alphorn theme just before its arrival in the horn; Brahms indicates that this, Clara's, theme should be played 'always loud and impassioned' (*ff[orte] sempre e passionato*). Shortly thereafter we hear the chorale, intoned by three trombones and three bassoons. Amidst the variations on the primary ('Beethoven') theme, the alphorn interrupts twice at moments of high tension. The concluding coda builds tension, furthering the impression that the 'Beethoven theme' will return, but to the end of the work Brahms obsessively varies just one short motive of it – essentially making what was once vocal into an instrumental tune. The chorale theme interrupts again, this time with more clarion horns and trumpets along with the trombones. Clara's theme does not return, and the previous interruptions, the unfilled return of the Beethoven theme, and the building tension and increase in tempo of the concluding *stringendo* and *più animato* all leave us expectant – much the way, perhaps, we have been wondering if Brahms and Clara ever consummated their love. But here, Brahms does no more than provide subtle clues to his beliefs in religion and nature as suprahuman, and to the deep friendship he communicated to Clara from afar amidst pastoral Alpine and musical landscapes.

On the one hand, Brahms's pastoral interjections reflect Marx's (1964) sentimental pastoral: a sort of shepherd longing for an unattainable love. On the other hand, the pastoral

moments reflect a more ideological use of the pastoral, not so much in Buell's conception of protesting injustice (2005: 15), but more in promoting an idea of what the symphony can be: alive after Beethoven, yes, and certainly not a vocal work (as Wagner proposed), but also a genre that can be comfortable in the pastoral mode. This latter position may have been somewhat unsettling for Beethoven, but Brahms took it on confidently in his next symphonic effort.

Brahms's Second Symphony (1877-78) is usually seen as a lyrical, pastoral relaxation after the toil of his First. But in Brinkmann's interpretation (1995), it is a 'late idyll' – a melancholic – pastoral. The music reflects this apparent opposition, while some biographical elements and the work's reception bolster such a reading.

As an idyll, Brahms's Second begins with musical features of the pastoral, or as Brinkmann puts it, the 'entrance of nature' (1995: 195). Over a string drone, the initial horn solo uses the unaltered (natural) notes of the instrument, providing a serene melody that resembles the Catholic Marian hymn *Milde Königin gedenke* (76). The woodwinds enter occasionally, providing brighter moments, and all occurs in regular four-square phrases. This is 'manifestly a world without conflicts. The Romantic nature-topos is patent' (54). Elsewhere, pastoral elements return, as with the drone and woodwind sonorities in the trio of the third movement. In performances recorded throughout the twentieth century, the first movement is played markedly slower than at the premiere and than indicated in the score; in fact, considering fourteen recordings between 1940 and 1983, Brinkmann finds that the symphony 'is conceived as going entirely at a medium tempo' thus providing a 'reflection of a serene and tranquil pastoral atmosphere' (30-31).

Since the first performances of Brahms's Second, critical reactions have emphasized the pastoral. After the premiere, Ferdinand Pohl wrote to Brahms's friend and publisher Fritz Simrock, 'Such music can only be composed in the country, in the midst of nature'; Simrock in turn wrote to Brahms that the four-hand piano reduction was 'full of sunshine' (Brinkmann 1995: 15-16). Theodor Billroth wrote to Brahms that '[a] happy, blissful atmosphere pervades the whole', exclaiming: 'Why, it is all blue sky, babbling of streams, sunshine and cool green shade!' Brahms himself even said in a letter to Adolf Schubring in November 1877: 'it's a quite innocent, cheerful little thing'. Yet some observers also reacted to the unusual moments; the anonymous reviewer of a January 1878 performance said that the first movement 'strikes up such an endearing and cheerful pastoral tone, and although this is

supplanted at times by the solemn sounds of trombones, like storms erupting over the calm, magnificent spring landscape, it always regains the upper hand, so that one imagines oneself transported back in time to the age of the idyll, which no savage passions were tearing apart'. (All translated in Brinkmann 1995: 13-16, 199.)

The trombones are not the only cloud to darken the idyll. The slow tempo and timpani undertones of the second movement, Brahms's only symphonic adagio, add a contrasting heaviness to the otherwise typically light inner movements of a symphony. The dark trombones (plus, in some cases, a tuba that Brahms added in the late stages of his composition; see Brinkmann 1995: 22-26) interrupt the pastoral quality of the beginning of the first movement and the lightness of the ending of the fourth movement, while also framing the symphony as a whole. Such dark bookends are also reflected in comments Brahms made about his composition to Simrock in November 1877: 'The new symphony is so melancholy that you won't stand it. I have never written anything so sad [...] the score must appear with a black border'. He also wrote to Elisabeth Von Herzogenberg in December 1877, 'Here the musicians are playing my latest with mourning bands because it sounds so woeful; it will be printed with a black border'. Again he wrote to Simrock in December 1877: 'But you must put a black border round the score so that it also shows its melancholy outwardly!' (Brinkmann 1995: 13-15).

These issues come together in a revealing exchange of letters between Brahms and Vincenz Lachner in August 1879. Lachner was critical of the darkening: 'Why do you throw into the idyllically serene atmosphere with which the first movement begins the rumbling kettledrum, the gloomy lugubrious tones of the trombones and tuba?' Brahms replied:

I very much wanted to manage in that first movement without using trombones, and tried to. [...] But their first entrance, that's mine, and I can't get along without it and thus the trombones. Were I to defend the passage, I would have to be long-winded.

I would have to confess that I am, by the by, a severely melancholic person, that black wings are constantly flapping above us [...] (Brinkmann 1995: 128)

Lachner was also critical of an unusual harmonic combination in the coda of the first movement: 'Maybe people will tolerate this kind of thing in future, perhaps finding pleasure in it, but my ear is too old for such things'. Brahms replied: 'But as for the note *a* that goes with the G minor in the coda, I'd like to defend that! For me it is a gorgeously beautiful

sound' (127-129).

These are rare confessions by Brahms. He may have been being ironic, as his 'black border' and 'black wings' statements contradicted his earlier expression about how 'cheerful' the Second was. Yet while the music may not be depressing or brooding, it does reflect the shadows in life, even as Brahms does not emphasize them. Brinkmann situates Brahms, along with other artists, in a 'late' era, one that was historically self-conscious and excluded from innocence. We can find insight in Brahms's irony, however: this mixture of the pastoral with the melancholic may represent Brahms's 'fractured relationship with serenity' (28). Brinkmann sees this represented in the very opening of the symphony: amidst the apparent pastoral idyll, tension and disruption lurk. Nevertheless, despite the interruptions and darkenings, Brahms's Second ends positively, problematizing Brinkmann's reading, as he recognizes (203ff.).

Some reactions to and characterizations of Brahms's Second may make it appear to fit into Marx's (1964) category of the 'popular' or simple pastoral. Brahms's take on the idyll may superficially resemble Knecht and Beethoven's three-part journeys, but his Second is less narratological, less teleological, and more jaded in its unfolding. The dark sounds of the brass interjections might suggest Marx's 'imaginative and complex' pastoral, but the counterforce is not entirely manifest. Thus Brinkmann's 'late idyll' is useful as a sort of middle ground between Marx's two categories. In Brahms's Second there are menacing shadows in otherwise peaceful pastoral glades.

Gustav Mahler's symphonic output engages with this very perspective but takes it further into the realm of Marx's complex pastoral. Mahler had an abiding interest in nature: his scores use similes such as 'like a sound of nature', the pastoral is a common topos in his music, and he retreated to the Alps to compose. Nature played a significant role in how Mahler conceived his own Romantic/artistic autobiography (Birchler 1991). But Mahler also had a fraught relationship with the modern city that breaks into his music (Peattie 2002a), for as he said: 'a symphony must be like the world; it must contain everything' — both the good and the bad. One of many examples, the Third Symphony (1893-96, revised 1906) illustrates this more pessimistic turn in the Mahlerian pastoral of fin-de-siècle Vienna.¹²

Mahler's interruptions, distorted recollections, and unstable moments in his Third Symphony, particularly in the posthorn episodes of the Scherzo (the third movement of six), reflect what Thomas Peattie (2002b) has called a broken pastoral, which may be roughly

equated with Marx's (1964) complex pastoral. The movement begins peacefully and sets up a series of sections that are fast-paced and in perpetual motion. A trumpet fanfare interrupts, followed by a slowing of motion; occasionally the strings and winds try to reclaim attention. The posthorn enters suddenly in this context, and immediately 'time seems to come to a standstill' (Peattie 2002b: 189): the arrival of the posthorn, its spatial separation (it is often played off stage) and the nearly static underpinning of the accompaniment all bring pastoral calm, but then echoes of the fanfare return before the posthorn moves on. The perpetual motion returns, yet the posthorn continues its varied interruptions, and the trumpet interjects its own fanfare before the scherzo continues. Peattie compares these gradual realizations to an episode in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-27), which stresses the processes of recollection and gradual emergence: through the struggle to recall, one attains a heightened state of memory, as with the successively distorted entries of the posthorn (2002b: 192). Furthermore, given Mahler's expressed ambivalent relationship with the metropolis which he needed for his career but from which he often longed to escape into more rural contexts, if the perpetual motions of the scherzo is 'an allegory of worldly bustle, it might be argued that it is this which triggers the fleeting pastoral escapes' (196). Beethoven wanted to escape Vienna for the countryside, but his response was one of personal, quasi-religious reverence, whereas Mahler finds the stark contrast worthy of distorted, or broken, recollection.

Mahler originally had a programmatic outline for the Third, but he never published it. The first movement was titled 'Pan Awakes, Summer Marches In', while the subsequent five movements all follow the formula 'What [...] Tell[s] Me', with informants ranging from flowers and animals to man, angels and Love. Movement four sets a text by Friedrich Nietzsche (from *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 1883-85), sung by an alto soloist, who, with women's and boy's choirs in movement five, sings a text from the German folk poetry collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805-08). Add in the Schopenhauerian influence, namely his concept of the 'will' (see Starr 2004), and the work might be characterized as a philosophical pastoral. Yet while certain ideas lean towards an idealistic view of human nature, the brooding, doubtful and pessimistic undercurrents and interruptions contribute to the overall pastoral rupture. In essence, the city functions as Marx's 'counterforce' for Mahler's complex, broken pastoral. The changes in symphonic pastorals in the long nineteenth century culminate with Mahler's *fin-de-siècle* take on one of the original cruxes of the pastoral mode: the conflict of city and country, or as Buell put it, a 'representation of rusticity in contrast to and often in satire of urbanism' (2005: 144).

Conclusion: Continuing Symphonic Pastorals

The symphony is fertile ground for ecomusicological interpretation. Despite an understandable perception that the genre is mute or ‘abstract’, musical and contextual features of symphonies can convey ideas about nature. The pastoral perspectives of symphonies in the long nineteenth century were changing: from Knecht’s dramatic and Beethoven’s personal spiritual idylls of the simple pastoral to Berlioz’s complex pastoral grotesquerie, from Brahms’s small-r romantic to his and Mahler’s bleaker more complex pastorals. While some of these works are clearly in the characteristic or programmatic subgenre, others, such as Brahms’s, are what would normally be considered ‘abstract’ (or at least non-programmatic). An important early voice on ecomusicological ideas, R. Murray Schafer, wrote in his seminal *Soundscales* (1977) that programme music is ‘imitative of environment’, while ‘[i]n absolute music composers fashion ideal soundscapes of the mind. [...] Absolute music is disengaged from the external environment[,] and its highest forms (the sonata, the quartet, the symphony) are conceived for indoor performance’ (1994: 103). While much music does exist to substantiate binary oppositions like Schafer’s, some of the symphonic pastorals presented here blur and complicate such otherwise facile understandings.

Although the works I selected above provide signposts in a brief tour through the nineteenth century, they do not necessarily represent a teleological drive towards a broken modern or post-modern symphonic outlook on the pastoral. Other symphonies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – both programmatic and non-programmatic – would readily disrupt such a tidy narrative. Even in the late eighteenth century, the pastoral had dark elements (Beckerman 1991), and considering other works would show the diversity of symphonic engagements with the pastoral. Numerous German symphonies evoke landscape and nation, reflecting Buell’s concepts of ‘pastoral nationalism’ and ‘old world tendencies’ (2005: 144); for example, Mendelssohn’s Fourth, *Italian* (1833) and Third, *Scottish* (1842); Schumann’s First, *Frühlingssinfonie* (‘Spring’, 1841) and Third, *Rheinische* (‘Rhennish’, 1850); and Raff’s Third, *Im Walde* (‘In the Forests’, 1869), Seventh, *In den Alpen* (‘In the Alps’, 1875), and Eighth through Eleventh, each based on one of the seasons (1877-83). Other national traditions include Bristow’s *Arcadian* (1872) and *Niagara* (1893) symphonies (American); Orefice’s *Sinfonia del Bosco* (‘Symphony of the Forest’, 1898) (Italian), and Dvořák’s Sixth Symphony (1880) (Czech). Furthermore, works of twentieth-century

composers have continued to engage with pastoral topics in diverse ways, ranging from idyllic landscapes to environmentalism to post-pastoralism; for example Ives's unconventional (and unfinished) *Universe Symphony* (1915-28) exhibits the aural and emotional influences of his regular vacations in the Adirondack Mountains (Tucker 1996); Strauss's *Eine Alpensinfonie* (1911-15) reflects a journey in the Alps (see Keym 2006, Satragni 1999, Toliver 2011); Zwilich used adult and children's choirs to exhort Thoreauvian and Biblical credos about nature and environmental stewardship in her Fourth Symphony, *The Gardens* (1999), particularly in the third movement 'A Pastoral Journey' (Von Glahn 2003); Vaughan Williams's Third Symphony, *Pastoral* (1921) was not a sentimental English pastoral but rather a reflection on the ravages of World War I (Saylor 2008); and Albert's wordless *Symphony: RiverRun* (1984) is post-pastoralist, in that it acknowledges its own participation in discourse about culture and nature (Watkins 2007).

Scholarly engagement with the literary pastoral has been a significant portion of ecocritical work. The examples illustrated and cited herein, however, show that even in a wordless and ostensibly 'abstract' genre, ecocritical interpretations are possible. Composers have ascribed and critics have interpreted meanings in symphonies, and ecomusicology can provide perspectives on these interrelations of nature, culture and music.

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[Notes go here]

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² This trend also existed in nineteenth-century America with critics such as J.S. Dwight proffering, in Von Glahn's words, 'penalties rather than rewards' for writing programme music (Von Glahn 2003: 273-4).

³ Despite widespread recognition of Knecht's *Portrait* and its relation to Beethoven's Sixth, no recording of the former is available. On the other hand, numerous recordings of Beethoven's symphonies are readily available; I recommend period-instrument recordings, such as those by Norrington (1988) or Gardiner (1994).

⁴ While Table 1 presents the movement titles of the Knecht in comparison with those of Beethoven and Berlioz, its analytical features will be more relevant in the section discussing Berlioz. The titles are from translations in Jones (1995: 18-19), Lockwood (2003: 226) and Temperley (1971: 597-598) for Knecht, Beethoven and Berlioz, respectively.

⁵ Rousseau (1768: 314-315, 398) used the *ranz des vaches* as an example of a particularly suggestive music: it is a cow herders' song traditionally played on bagpipes to livestock that apparently caused Swiss troops stationed abroad to cry, desert or die because of the memories it evoked when they heard it (and thus such men were forbidden to hear it).

⁶ Beethoven may have known about Knecht's *Portrait*, as both men had works published by the firm of Bossler in the 1780s; furthermore, Beethoven may have seen his works listed next to those of Knecht in Traeg's catalogue of 1799 (Höhn 1984, xvii).

⁷ Numerous recordings of Berlioz's *Fantastic* are available; I recommend the video recording conducted by Gardiner (2007), which uses period instruments.

⁸ Although an insightful account of the work from an authoritative scholar, some minor portions of Temperley's arguments would need to be updated due to recent discoveries, such as those of Macdonald (1993), who demonstrates Berlioz's recycling of old material into new works.

⁹ Cone (1971: 21-25) provides the original and a translation of the programme; see also Temperley (1971: 597-598). All italics and all ellipses not in brackets are original.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Reinhold Brinkmann for these observations. I might add that an analysis of Knecht's *Portrait* resembles vaguely the later Beethoven and Berlioz pieces: Knecht's first movement may be perceived from the interior perspectives of the shepherd and shepherdess, the middle three movements are the exterior natural events, while the final movement returns to the interiority of a prayer, albeit from 'Nature' rather than a human.

¹¹ The recording by Abbado (1998) is a clear articulation of some features discussed here, particularly the end of the finale.

¹² The DVD by Starr (2004) provides historical, philosophical and music-analytical insights into Mahler's Third, and provides a complete performance, with subtitles for the sung text, of the unusually long work (one of the longest in the standard repertoire).

Table 1.			
Knecht Portrait musical (1785)	Beethoven Sixth Symphony (1808)	Analysis of Beethoven and Berlioz	Berlioz Symphonie fantastique (1830)
I. A beautiful landscape where the sun shines, the gentle breezes blow, the brooks flow through the valley; the birds warble, a puting stream descends from a height, the shepherd pipes, the lambs frolic and the sweet voice of the shepherdess is heard.	I. The Awakening of Joyous Feelings on Getting Out into the Countryside	Personal feelings / emotions	I. Daydreams – Passions
		▲ Interior World ▲	
		▼ Exterior World ▼	
II. The heavens darken and cloud over; every living thing is breathless and frightened. Black clouds accumulate, winds whistle, the distant thunder rumbles and the storm slowly approaches.	II. Scene by the Brook	Pastoral scene	* III. In the Fields
III. With howling winds and driving rain, the storm breaks in full fury, the treetops groan, the foaming waters rush with a dreadful noise.	III. Merry Gathering of Country People	Dance	* II. A Ball
IV. Gradually the storm subsides, the clouds disperse and the sky clears.	IV. Thunderstorm	Threatening power	IV. March to the Scaffold.
		▲ Exterior World ▲	[Social threat]
		▼ Interior World ▼	
V. Nature, transported with joy, lifts its voice to heaven and gives thanks to the Creator in soft and pleasant songs.	V. Shepherd's Song, Happy and Thankful Feelings after the Storm	Personal feelings / emotions	V. Sabbath Night's Dream
		Conclusion	[Negative / grotesque]
		* movements eventually switched	